

Fall/Winter 2021

Saint Stephen's

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sacred Silence

*The CELTIC
Worship TRADITION*

Being the HANDS

+ *FEET of Jesus*

**REACH OUT TO
YOUR NEIGHBORS** *p. 14*

CATCHING SOME RAYS Saint Stephen's has become the first church in Birmingham to harness the power of the sun with the installation of a 104-kilowatt solar energy system. Bishop Glenda Curry (below) rode a lift high above the roof to bless the completed project on September 29. The solar panels will offset approximately 25 percent of the church's energy consumption, which will free up additional funds for ministry and mission activities. Photo by George Mänge.





Diving Lessons

This past summer, I enjoyed the remarkable gift of spending two weeks with the young people of our church at our two flagship diocesan youth programs. The first week was spent at Sawyerville, which is a summer program for the young people of Greensboro, Alabama. The next week was spent as one of the program directors for Camp McDowell.

Being immersed in the world of youth ministry reminded me how many of our young people, sharing their summers as camp counselors, give all they have to share joy, faith, and love with others. It's awesome and exhausting—and people love it. At the conclusion of our daily staff meetings at Camp McDowell, the entire summer staff would say, "Remember, camp is not a job. It's a lifestyle."

I chuckled as I heard those words. They are very true. One has to see something as more than just a job, or a thing done for a few hours a day, in order to be a camp counselor. It takes giving completely of oneself, of diving in with all that we have to offer.

At Saint Stephen's, we imagine the full Christian life as a gift that deepens

the more we dive in. In our second issue of this magazine, you might notice a recurring theme. As in our first issue, we are presenting stories of worship along with outreach, care of creation, pastoral care, and Christian learning—the four pillars of our community's shared ministry. As we tell these stories, we affirm that when we care for others, ourselves, and God's created world (and take time to reflect on how this shapes our common life), we find that our full selves are committed to Christ. Church is not just a Sunday thing—it's a lifestyle. Maybe, better yet, it is a way of life.

I hope these stories help you consider your own way of life. And more than anything, I hope they deepen the way you live through the community gathered here at Saint Stephen's. Be inspired—and may our faith be something not just for Sundays, but a way of life!

John Burruss+

RECTOR

SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

"When we care for others, ourselves, and God's created world (and take time to reflect on how this shapes our common life), we find that our full selves are committed to Christ."



(Photos) Burruss shares in the work, fun, and worship at Sawyerville and Camp McDowell.



6



14



18

Contents

FEATURES

- 6 The Sacred Silence of the Celtic Service**
LISTENING FOR GOD'S STILL, SMALL VOICE
- 10 Reading About Race, Reflecting on Reconciliation**
BOOK DISCUSSIONS REVEAL DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
- 14 Being the Hands and Feet of Jesus**
WAYS YOU CAN REACH OUT AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBORS
- 16 Knit Together in Love**
PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY OFFERS WARMTH AND COMFORT
- 18 Nature and Nurture**
HOLY HIKES PROVIDE PATHS TO EXPLORE GOD'S CREATION TOGETHER

DEPARTMENTS

- 20 Life Events**
SACRED MOMENTS IN THE STORY OF SAINT STEPHEN'S
- 21 News + Events**
INFORMATION, IMPORTANT DATES, AND MORE

Vol. 1, No. 2 • Fall/Winter 2021 • © 2021 Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church
205-967-8786 • ssechurch.org



- The Rev. John Burruss** • Rector
- The Rev. Katherine Harper** • Associate Rector for Pastoral Care and Liturgy
- The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts** • Associate Rector for Formation and Outreach
- The Rev. Ron Delbene** • Priest Associate
- Pat Bills** • Administrative Assistant
- Patrick Brock** • Club 56 Intern
- Zachary Brown** • Parish Administrator
- Maria Elena Cruz** • Housekeeper
- Micah Cummings** • Facilities Manager
- Leslie Dunlap** • Preschool Director and Wedding Coordinator
- Ryas Esdale** • Club 56 Intern
- Ethan Evans** • Youth Ministries Assistant
- Katie Holmes** • Interim Accompanist
- Ann Day Hunt** • Financial Manager
- Jennifer Jones** • Director of Children's Ministry
- Andy Meginniss** • Folk Music Director
- Michael Morrissey** • Facilities Staff
- Whitney Page** • Music Director
- Amy Passey** • Minister for Welcome and Evangelism
- Catherine Poellnitz** • Director of Youth Ministries
- Maggie Widman** • Nursery Director

Magazine: **Charles Buchanan**, Project Manager • **Karin Fecteau**, Art Director • **Van Chaplin, Emily Hillhouse**, Photographers

Listening for God's Still, Small Voice

The

SACRED *Silence*

of the Celtic Service

The Rev. John Burruss



“This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord. It is made ready for those who love him and for those who want to love him more. So come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been here long, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed. Come, because it is the Lord who invites you. It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.”





“
Finding an hour not only to silence our mobile devices, but also to quiet our thoughts allows us a time and space to hear the still, small voice of God. Or, in the words of the psalmist, to ‘be still, and know that I am God.’
 ”



(Top left and above) Musicians help set the intimate, introspective tone of the Celtic service. Andy Meginniss, Saint Stephen’s folk music director, plays guitar, joined by Kathy Hinkle on bass and Rob Angus on the hammered dulcimer. **(Top right)** Abigail Workman plays the harp.

If there is a single statement that captures our community’s ethos and welcome, then it is likely the invitation to the table that has begun celebrations of Holy Eucharist at Saint Stephen’s for almost a decade. When I came to Saint Stephen’s, people shared stories of how they found a place and a home here, and their stories often began with this prayer. This prayer has led people not only to join our church community but also to be baptized into the Body of Christ.

Some may be surprised to learn that this beautiful prayer is not from our *Book of Common Prayer* (where the Episcopal Church gets its prayers and liturgy), though it does capture much of what we love about the Episcopal Church. These words of invitation are adapted from the Iona Community in Scotland, a place where Christianity has flourished for almost 1,400 years in its own way, distinctive from much of Western Christianity while serving as a source of light and hopefulness for many people around the world. Since the seventh century, Iona has been one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Christianity. Even a few parishioners from Saint Stephen’s have made this journey—including one of our community’s founding members, Dottie Thompson.

Now, on Sunday evenings, that historic Celtic worship tradition inspires a service that is unique in Birmingham. Quietly entering a Nave illuminated by the soft glow of candles, people find in our Celtic Eucharist a refuge for reflection and contemplation. Depending on the week, musicians play any combination of cello, violin, flute, hammered dulcimer, bass, harp, piano, or guitar. Some parishioners remain seated throughout the service while others kneel or stand as they feel led during the prayers and moments of silence. Interspersed in the service of Holy Eucharist are prayers drawn from the Celtic tradition—ancient words from Northumbria and Iona—alongside more modern prayers and reflections by authors like John Philip Newell. Silences are intentionally woven into the space between the readings and

prayers while a longer silence after the sermon allows time and space for reflection.

“I feel the silence and contemplation are necessary for me to learn how to follow Jesus,” says Lisa Beatty, who serves as a team leader for the Celtic service. Currently, four teams work in a monthly rotation to provide hospitality, set up the candles and the altar for communion, serve as readers and Eucharistic ministers, and pray together before the service for those soon to gather in the space. “When I leave, I feel better equipped to live as Jesus has taught because I have had a chance to be quiet and reflect on my life,” Beatty says.

Our world can feel chaotic, filled with noise, busyness, and overstimulation. Even Sunday mornings at many Episcopal churches like ours run on a tight schedule to ensure that all programs, choirs, formation classes, and services happen. But if this is the norm, then how do we take seriously the need to create a sacred space for an organic and spirit-filled encounter with the Risen Christ? Finding an hour not only to silence our mobile devices but also to quiet our thoughts allows us a time and space to hear the still, small voice of God. Or, in the words of the psalmist, to “be still, and know that I am God.”

While every service at Saint Stephen’s aims to help people grow in their knowledge and love of God, Sunday evenings are a little



Join the Celtic service at 5:00 p.m. in the Nave every Sunday.

different. When so many have become disillusioned with the church, if we are to believe faithfully that the Holy Spirit is at work, then our Celtic liturgy gives credence to the creative power of God doing something new in our midst. And it’s the hope of the community that those who encounter

this liturgy will feel the power of God at work in their lives: “Come, because it is the Lord who invites you. It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.”



Allen Howell

READING ABOUT RACE, REFLECTING ON RECONCILIATION

Book discussion groups reveal different perspectives

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts

A First Read on Race: *Waking Up White*

In May 2020, the Rector's Reading Group led by the Rev. John Burruss was scheduled to discuss Debby Irving's memoir, *Waking Up White*. The timing of those discussions, as it turned out, was providential. That month, the video of Ahmaud Arbery's February 23 killing in Brunswick, Georgia, went viral—followed, weeks later, by George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis. For those in the book group, reading and reflecting on Irving's work influenced the ways in which they processed these tragic events and the resulting public protests and dialogues on issues of race.

Irving's memoir, which chronicles her upbringing in southern Massachusetts, helps illustrate the point that racism and bias are not exclusive to the South. Allen

Howell, a regular in the reading group, gleaned from Irving's story that "We all have implicit bias. We all have blind spots. Discussing this with friends from church doesn't necessarily make it easier." He adds that the book helped give him an increased awareness that "somebody may be walking a completely different path from you," reminding us of the importance of "expanding your circle, meeting other people," and "learning to look at things differently."

Vicky Marty, who moved from Pennsylvania to Birmingham when she was 11, says Irving's story was "exactly my experience. Otherness was not on my radar," she recalls. But then Marty had what she describes as her own "waking-up-white moment." Every day, as she drove from her home to attend

classes at Birmingham-Southern College, she passed by Sixteenth Street Baptist Church—and remembers seeing it after it was bombed in September 1963 (when the four little girls were killed). Around that time, a classmate invited her to a panel on racial discrimination at Miles College in Fairfield, and her awareness of racism began to grow. Today, Marty sees the connections between racism and poverty. "You can't ignore poverty these days—the lack of access," she says. "We are all equal, but we don't all have equal access."

Waking Up White also deeply moved Carol Myers. "This book helped me realize that I am racist and need to work on things," she says. "I am proud that I can recognize it in myself." Myers explains that reading this book, as well as listening to the Sunday Forum presentation by Trey Walk of the Equal Justice Initiative, helped her gain awareness of redlining in home financing (discriminating against people based upon the racial makeup of neighborhoods), racism in hiring practices, and the initial denial of equal access to GI Bill benefits for Black veterans. She was also struck by the story of Black parents who had to talk with their children about what to do—and not do—if they were pulled over by the police. It was a story that sprang to mind when the news broke about George Floyd, she says.

Love is the Way: Reflecting on Race in the Season of Lent

During Lent, the time for reflection and repentance in the 40 days leading up to Easter, three small groups read and discussed *Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times*, by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. His recollection of growing up as an African American in a segregated time—and ultimately becoming a priest and bishop in the largely white Episcopal church—is an inspiring story of hope and love.

"He was so open with how he had been treated as a Black man," says group member Susan Cleage. "Many books on race are written by white people, so it was good to read about it from a Black person's point of view."

Myers, who is part of two reading groups, was touched by Curry's account of his father, who was training to become a Baptist minister when he attended an Episcopal service with the young woman he was dating. (She would later become his wife and Curry's mother.) At communion, Curry's father waited to see what would happen when Blacks and whites went forward to drink from a common cup. Once he observed how white parishioners didn't think twice about receiving wine from the same chalice, he knew



Carol Myers



Vicky Marty

he had found the church where he belonged. Curry's father later became an Episcopal priest, leading the way for his son to do the same.

In another story, Curry, then a bishop, visited a cathedral housing a bishop's seat that had been crafted long ago by enslaved artisans. Curry had a choice: He could make a point about slavery by choosing not to sit in the chair, or he could make a point about honoring

“HOW DO WE LEARN TO STAND AND KNEEL AT THE SAME TIME?”

the hands of those who created it by choosing to sit in the chair. Myers was impressed with the way Curry was able to neutralize what could have been a more tense situation by “looking for a way to mend” the breach that divides us, she says.

Howell sees a connection between *Love is the Way*

and an earlier Tuesday book group selection, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Curry's book shares a similar spirit for “laying out a path” when you find yourself asking, “How do I respond to life when life gets challenging?” Howell says. For example, Curry recalls his friendship with a young man whom he believed was dealing drugs in their Baltimore neighborhood. “Bishop Curry admits he was upset,” Howell says, “but by leading with love, he was able to get through to this person. He has this very benign way of redirecting, reframing the whole situation.” Howell sees *Love is the Way* as “an unofficial guidebook of going out into the community and making a difference.”

Cleage agrees, saying she “loved the story of the young man, how he evolved, and how he kept coming back. He just wanted to know more.” The story reminded her of the years she taught high school special education, when she often encountered “teenagers who were poor and Black” and who “wanted to learn,” she says.

Marty was struck by Curry's recollection of a meeting with other key Anglican Communion leaders when the United States Episcopal Church had just taken a stand on same-sex marriage that was at odds with the

views of many of those leaders. Marty appreciates “the beauty of his ability to bridge the gap, of having the words to help people see a different point of view—and not just because of what he said, but because of who he was.” She says Curry's stories have helped her realize that the key question to ask ourselves is “How do we learn to stand and kneel at the same time?”

What Happens Next?

“Almost every book club culminates with a ‘what now? Where do we go from here?’” Howell says. Each book about race and reconciliation “warms you up for the next step,” he explains. “How do we take this cerebral conversation and get a little uncomfortable with it?” Marty suggests that more conversations—and listening—can help people get past their fears.

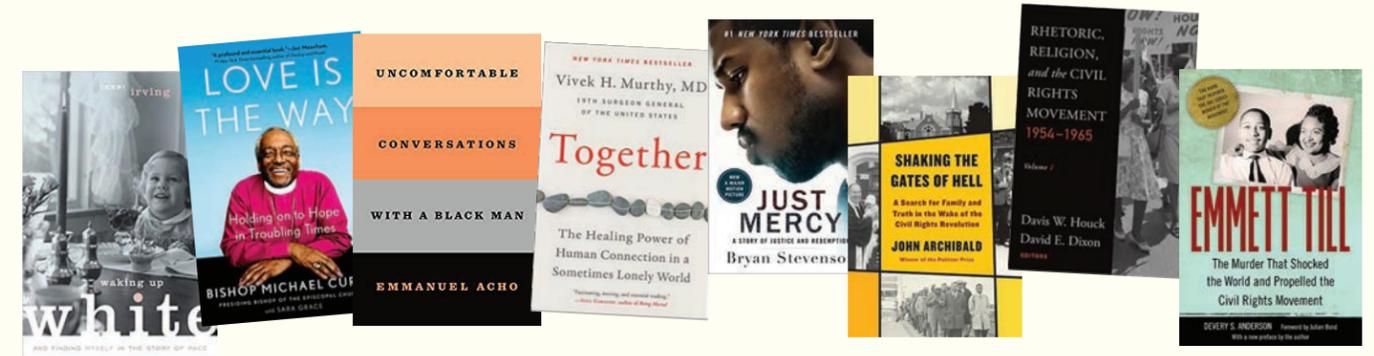
“I hope everybody comes together” to address the issue, both at Saint Stephen's and in the wider community, Myers says. “I don't like the word ‘woke,’ but . . . I feel like I've changed the way I want to be. But the question is, have I changed? It's a journey.”



Susan Cleage

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20



Recommended Reading from the Saint Stephen's Book Groups

Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving (Elephant Room Press, 2014)
Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times, by the Most Rev. Michael Curry (Avery, 2020)
The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams (Penguin Publishing Group, 2016)
Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man, by Emmanuel Acho (Flatiron Press, 2020)
Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World, by Vivek Murthy (Harper Wave, 2020)

Books Written or Recommended by Guest Speakers

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption, by Bryan Stevenson (One World, 2015)
Shaking the Gates of Hell: A Search for Family and Truth in the Wake of the Civil Rights Revolution, by John Archibald (Knopf, 2021)
Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement, edited by Davis Houck and David Dixon (Baylor UP, 2006)
Emmett Till: The Murder that Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement, by Devery S. Anderson (University Press of Mississippi, 2017)
This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church, edited by Westina Matthews (Morehouse Publishing, 2021)

Sunday Forums on Race and Reconciliation

On Sunday mornings during Lent 2021, Saint Stephen's hosted online presentations by speakers from around the South on topics such as diversity throughout Holy Scripture, the history of slavery and racism at an Episcopal university, and the lingering impacts of slavery and segregation on the economy and criminal justice system. Watch each presentation on YouTube: [youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham/playlists](https://www.youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham/playlists).



Being *the* Hands and Feet of Jesus

WAYS YOU CAN REACH OUT AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBORS

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts

1 GraceWorks
 GraceWorks is a ministry affiliated with Grace Episcopal Church in Woodlawn. Established in 2013, GraceWorks focuses on its summer youth mentoring and education program, which it plans to expand into a year-round initiative.
 Several years ago, GraceWorks acquired an abandoned church property around the corner from Grace Church. With support from Saint Stephen's and other community partners, GraceWorks is renovating this property into GracePlace, a community center for youth and a host of programs meant to uplift and empower people in Woodlawn and surrounding communities.
 Saint Stephen's has made a special investment in one element of the renovation project—the construction of a laundry room

that will become the permanent home for our Laundry Love ministry. Before the pandemic, Saint Stephen's volunteers hosted monthly or quarterly Laundry Love days at two Woodlawn laundromats, allowing people who do not have their own washers and dryers the chance to do something many of us may take for granted: wash their clothes, towels, and bedding. Once our Laundry Love at GracePlace facility is complete, volunteers from Saint Stephen's and other churches will be able to host laundry days on a weekly (or maybe even twice weekly) basis.



How to Begin: To support GraceWorks, participate in the renovation project, or volunteer for their community programs, contact the Rev. Deacon Kay Williams: 2Cor915@live.com or 205.305.4179. Learn more about GraceWorks at graceworksbbham.org.

2 Avondale Breakfast Ministry
 When the Abbey, an Episcopal mission in Avondale, closed its doors, the Avondale Breakfast Ministry needed a new place to serve meals to the homeless, the needy, and the poor—individuals and families who are struggling to make ends meet. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the ministry has moved into the parking lot outside Beloved Community Church, where volunteers serve breakfast from the backs of their cars. On Monday mornings, Saint Stephen's volunteers offer hot biscuits or burritos and share snack bags to help nourish people throughout the day. Volunteers also collect and share hygiene items, clothing, shoes, and bus passes—all important items to help our Avondale neighbors stay healthy and employed. In the process, volunteers form friendships with these brothers and sisters across town.

Anyone can make snack bags at home and bring them to Saint Stephen's by 2:45 p.m. every Thursday. Snack bags include items such as granola bars, chips, crackers, cookies, beef jerky, bananas, clementines, and juice boxes. People also donate pallets of water bottles, hygiene items (wipes, hand sanitizer, razors, deodorant, small soaps, toothbrushes, travel-size toothpaste), and clothing (especially men's

T-shirts, socks, boxers, gloves, and hats). Walmart and Amazon gift cards help the Avondale outreach team acquire other needed items such as work boots and phone chargers.
How to Begin: To make meals and snack bags at home or to join the rotation of volunteers serving meals on Monday mornings, contact Dolly King: Dolly924@bellsouth.net or 205.913.2526. You can also use the SignUpGenius link in the weekly e-news.

3 Parish Partnership with Christ Church, Fairfield
 In August 2021, Saint Stephen's and Christ Episcopal Church became Parish Partners, part of a program initiated by Bishop Glenda Curry to encourage creative collaboration among churches in the Diocese of Alabama. Working with the Rev. Paul Goldman and the lay leaders of Christ Church, we will collaborate on worship, outreach, and other activities that will bring together the people of both parishes. This cross-pollination will help both parishes to feel more connected to what we share as Episcopal Christians and as neighbors in our Greater Birmingham community.

How to Begin: Look for opportunities to connect with Christ Church over the coming months in the weekly e-news, or email the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts: becky@ssechurch.org.

(Photos) In Woodlawn, Saint Stephen's clergy and parishioners add muscle to the GraceWorks project to transform an abandoned church into a community center.





Knit Together in Love

The Rev. Katherine Harper

May their hearts be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ.

COLOSSIANS 2:2

That verse—

with the idea of being “knit together in love”—creates an image of warmth and comfort, doesn't it? These words from the apostle Paul to the church in Colossae were issued when he was absent from them, and they really needed encouragement and guidance. Each word Paul crafted was hewn in a way that would provide nurture, understanding, and a stronger, more united Christian community. The message was intentional and strategic, based in the witness of Christ Jesus.

Just as the structure of Paul's ancient rhetorical style bound the young Christian church together so that it would grow stronger and flourish, I am reminded of the sequences of stitches that are lovingly and prayerfully secured when parishioners knit prayer shawls for Saint Stephen's members in times of need, illness, or change. Grief and hardship are lonely spaces, and a prayer shawl becomes a source of reassurance and knowledge of God's love, even though we may feel far from our gracious God's reach at times.

Jane Pounds, one of the volunteers who stitches together the shawls, describes the process of making these soft and strong creations: People of the church often donate yarns, and all are welcome to help in the shawl ministry, she says. Supplies are provided along with instruction for

those who want to learn. Knitters sometimes gather at church to visit and try new patterns. The process can take weeks to months, depending on the complexity of the stitch, pattern, and size of a shawl as well as the speed of the knitter. Each person works at a different pace but completes a shawl in the same way—by sewing in a tag and a small metal cross to connect it with the Saint Stephen's pastoral care ministry.

Beyond the visual beauty of the shawls, much prayer goes into their warmth and comfort. Drawing each repetitive stitch is an invitation to pray for the future recipient, Pounds says. The physical rhythm of sewing becomes an opening to “breath prayers,” such as “Come Holy Spirit.” A pattern with three-stitch repetition can even be a way to focus on the Trinity—God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whichever prayers the knitter chooses, they help keep the hands moving while offering a sense of stillness in mind and heart.

The creation of the shawl, a gift to someone in need, ultimately becomes an extended conversation of presence between God and the knitter—which is also a gift of deepened faith.

In the past year, our families and friends have sustained hard losses. Loved ones have been ill. Some recovered. Others have died. Prayer shawls for those grieving or those who are about to enter a time of transition in life create a sense of warmth and reassurance, regardless of the outcome. One parishioner sent pictures of herself during cancer treatment with the Saint Stephen's prayer shawl resting upon her shoulders as a mantle of prayerful protection.



Saint Stephen's knitters also lovingly craft warm hats and scarves for Birmingham neighbors who are exposed to the elements during cold winters and cuddly baby blankets for parents of newborns in our church community.

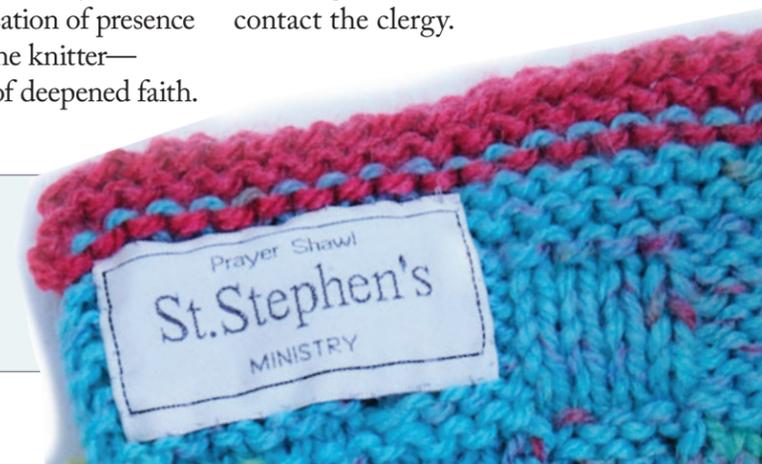
Another person in our community received a prayer blanket as his spouse entered her final days of life. It was a source of comfort for both of them in that transitional time.

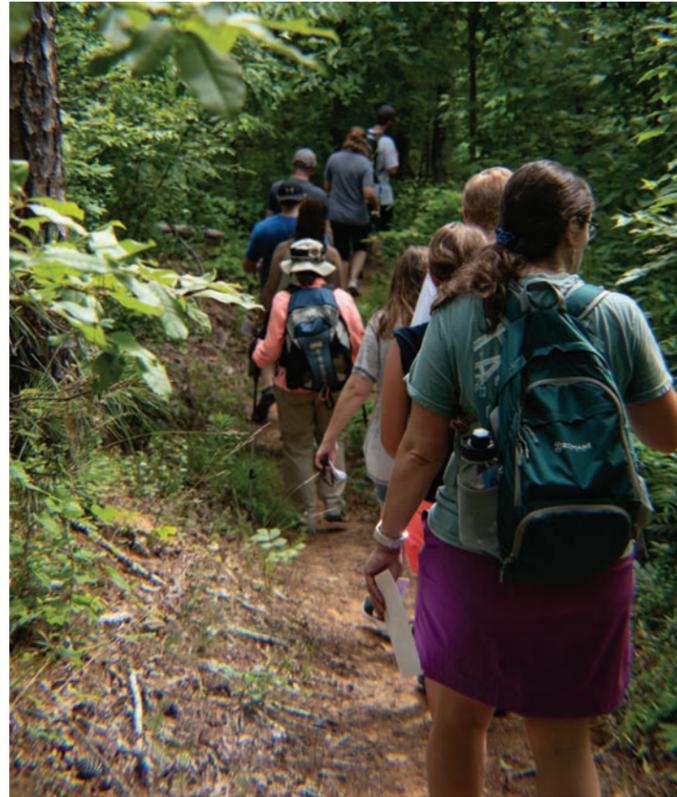
At Saint Stephen's, we are a community knit together in God's love, focusing our eyes upon the works of Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit. If you are looking for a creative, prayerful endeavor, consider joining the prayer shawl ministry. If you know of someone

who could be strengthened by the prayers of our pastoral care volunteers and a tangible token of encouragement and God's love, contact the clergy.

Saint Stephen's Grief Group:

If you are grieving a change or loss in your life and would like to seek support and Christian community through this hard and holy work, reach out to the Rev. Katherine Harper: katherine@ssechurch.org.





Nature and Nurture

Allen Howell, *Holy Hikes Birmingham Director*
Photos: Emily Hillhouse

Holy Hikes are a church service without the building. Replacing brick walls and hardwood floors with Alabama pines and red clay, the hikes give participants a chance to experience God’s creation in community with others.

Walk and Worship

Saint Stephen’s has sponsored Birmingham’s chapter of Holy Hikes, a national eco-ministry dedicated to creating opportunities to worship God together in the great outdoors, for nearly three years. The hikes are generally two to four miles in length with difficulty levels ranging from easy to moderate. Following a prayer, participants progress through a service of Holy Eucharist as they walk the trails together, making stops along the way for hikers to catch up, read scripture, join a prayer, and reflect on their surroundings. A lay leader navigates the trails while a clergy person leads prayers and celebrates the Eucharist.

Natural Wonders

Holy Hikes take place at scenic natural spots across the Birmingham region. Hikers have traversed over former mines in Red Mountain Park, slipped through giant boulders at Moss Rock Preserve, peeked between trees for skyline views at Ruffner Mountain, and waded into the water to get a closer look at Cahaba lilies in Helena. Children on the hikes run, meander, climb, and jump into puddles. Because they are free from the usual constraints of an indoor church service, children can share a laugh with friends, ask questions, and investigate wildlife, from crawling bugs to soaring birds.

(Photos) Nearly 40 people from Saint Stephen’s and a few local churches walked the trails of Helena’s Cahaba River Park in June to spot the rare Cahaba lilies, which grow only in swift-flowing streams in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.

Trails of Hope

Last year, Holy Hikes took on a special significance when the pandemic changed the way the world could worship and be in communion. Rooted in God’s creation, the hikes continued despite waves of quarantine and uncertainty, offering the opportunity to be together—socially distant but still in person.

A Zoom conference call with Holy Hikes chapters across the United States also introduced us to the Rev. Dr. Becky Watts, then the leader of a Holy Hikes chapter in College Station, Texas. When she joined the Saint Stephen’s clergy, her first day “at the office” brought her to Red Mountain Park, where she served as officiant for the August 2020 Holy Hike.

A Step Toward Good Health

Countless scientific studies have shown the benefits of being outside. A short walk outdoors can lower heart rates. Backyard gardening reduces stress. Even viewing natural photographs indoors helps the body to relax—from the tension in our muscles to the ways our heart,

brain, and lungs shift their operation. We are interconnected with the Earth in ways we do not fully understand yet.

A Sense of Stewardship

God spent five days weaving together his creation before he created us. In our own hubris, we often distort our responsibility to uphold God’s gift to us. Unfortunately, we do not just subdue and hold dominion over the plants and wildlife. We also go beyond our duties to the point of destruction, depletion, and extinction.

Care of creation is one of the four ministry pillars of Saint Stephen’s. By being good stewards of our environment, we take care of ourselves and our surroundings so we can pass on God’s gift to the next generation. Holy Hikes provide Saint Stephen’s parishioners and hikers from across Alabama with opportunities to immerse themselves in God’s creation by engaging all five senses. To uphold our responsibility for this gift of creation, we must first understand its value.



Join an upcoming Holy Hike to enjoy the beauty and splendor of God’s creation together. Hikes begin at 9:00 a.m. Locations will be posted at ssechurch.org/sse-events.

November 6
March 5
April 2
May 7
June 4

Sacred moments in the story of Saint Stephen's

May-September 2021

BAPTISMS

- Jett Dean Drummond, May 9, 2021
- Christopher William Free, May 23, 2021
- Heaslett Ann Truss, June 6, 2021
- David George William Way, June 6, 2021
- Victoria Katherine James Way, June 6, 2021
- Campbell Jacqueline Noble, June 13, 2021
- Stephen Huger Noble V, June 13, 2021
- Everett Michael Chafin, August 22, 2021
- McKenzie Marie Mulligan, September 19, 2021
- McCollister Hill Williams, September 25, 2021
- Samantha Lynn Pantazis, September 26, 2021

MEMBER DEATHS

- Sabrina King, May 10, 2021
- Nick Bondi, May 28, 2021
- Charles Elliott "Brother" Carper III, July 13, 2021
- William Wood Byrd Jr., August 10, 2021

ORDINATION

- The Rev. Susan Lott Oakes, May 26, 2021



(Upper corner and top row, left to right) Families and friends celebrate the baptisms of Jett Dean Drummond; Everett Michael Chafin; David George William Way and Victoria Katherine James Way; and Christopher William Free. (Above left) Bishop Glenda Curry and clergy attend the ordination of the Rev. Susan Oakes. (Above right) Oakes shares her special moment with her husband, Steve.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Summertime Snapshots

Jennifer Jones, Director of Children's Ministry

Summer means Vacation Bible School (VBS), but this year, the grownups got to join in the fun. Families gathered on Wednesday nights throughout June and July for dinner from area food trucks and music from local talent while kids enjoyed a traditional VBS. Children learned about God's great light and ways to share this light with others everywhere they go. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped with crafts, skits, amazing science experiments, and behind-the-scenes tasks that made VBS so memorable.

As summer came to a close, families gathered again to kick off the school year with a community back-to-school blessing in the parking lot. Students of all ages received prayers, backpack tags, and water bottles, and the Children's Ministry program provided refreshing treats from the Doodles truck.

Discover more fun and family activities in the Children's Ministry weekly email. Contact Jennifer Jones (jennifer@ssechurch.org) to join the list.



(Middle row, left) Science experiments added to the fun of VBS nights. (Other photos) The back-to-school blessing gave the new academic year a sweet start.

YOUTH MINISTRIES

EYC Eyes Fall Activities

Catherine Poellnitz, Director of Youth Ministries

With the world changing so quickly, the Saint Stephen's Episcopal Youth Community (EYC) strives to create and implement meaningful, fun, and faith-driven programs and experiences for our future world changers—our young people. EYC welcomes all youth in grades 7-12.

This summer, for example, Saint Stephen's youth helped lead and support the diocese through events at Sawyerville and the Special Session, and they also enjoyed trips to Camp McDowell. Working in leadership roles gives a sense of accomplishment. For youth, these roles provide an opportunity to serve others while continuing to develop their own gifts and talents.

The first event for the fall was the annual EYC Retreat, which is a Camp McDowell session just for our EYC. We ate meals together; sang together; had programs together; swam, hiked, and played games together; and ended each night with Compline. This kickoff event is the best way for EYC members to get to know each other at the beginning of each school year.

Throughout October and early November, youth in ninth grade and above can choose to participate in our six-week Confirmation preparation program, which requires meeting with an adult mentor for an hour each week as well as a conversation with one of our clergy. Bishop Glenda Curry will visit Saint Stephen's for Confirmation on November 17.

More events and programs are planned, and we look forward to reconnecting with all youth this fall. Stay up to date with weekly, monthly, and annual offerings through the weekly EYC email and our Instagram and Facebook pages. **Contact Catherine "CPo" Poellnitz to learn more: catherinep@ssechurch.org.**

(Top and center) Senior and junior high students enjoy time together at Camp McDowell as both campers and counselors. (Right) Saint Stephen's youth attend Happening #78, a spiritual weekend retreat, at Camp McDowell.



Get to Know Our Newest Staff



ZACHARY BROWN, Parish Administrator
Zachary joins us from the human resources department of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLC, a national law firm headquartered in Birmingham. Previously, he was the assistant to the vice president of business affairs at the University of Montevallo. Zachary focuses on details and is a connector of people and ideas—a unique gift that will prove invaluable at Saint Stephen's.



AMY PASSEY, Minister for Welcome and Evangelism
Amy's primary responsibility is helping newcomers and parishioners live into their gifts and talents by connecting them with formation, pastoral care, outreach, and care of creation opportunities. Currently, Amy is working on her certificate in spiritual direction from the Metagem Institute. Her passion for caring for others and her commitment to making everyone feel welcome and included are among the many reasons we are excited that she has rejoined our staff.



ETHAN EVANS, Youth Ministries Assistant
Ethan is a junior at Birmingham-Southern College studying photojournalism and Arab studies. He enjoys hiking, reading, watching TV and movies, and photography. Catherine Poellnitz, director of youth ministries, describes him as "incredibly kind, wonderfully equipped to relate to and lead youth, and the perfect amount of goofy."

save the date

Join us for fun and fellowship at Camp McDowell in 2022:

Women's Retreat • January 28-30
Men's Retreat • April 8-10
Parish Retreat • September 2-4

Greece
June 14 – 23, 2022

Especially designed for **St. Stephen's Episcopal Church**
Birmingham, Alabama

Reserve Your Space Today
Download a brochure at portal.myfaithjourneys.com
Group Number: 22026

The Rev. John Burruss
Tour Host



SAINT STEPHEN'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

3775 Crosshaven Drive
Vestavia Hills, AL 35223

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

BIRMINGHAM, AL
PERMIT #215

*Consider the lilies of the
field, how they grow; they
neither toil nor spin, yet I
tell you, even Solomon in
all his glory was not clothed
like one of these.*

Matthew 6:28b-29

